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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the need to prepare teachers as agents for a culture of peace. It notes that the core values in a culture of peace are environmental sustainability, cultural diversity, human solidarity, social responsibility, and gender equality. For each of these values, there is a complementary human capacity to be developed through teacher education, making it possible for teachers to cultivate these values and capacities in their students. These capacities are ecological awareness, cultural competency, global agency, conflict proficiency, and gender sensitivity. The paper suggests a number of recommendations to help promote developments in these directions, addressing them to UNESCO, ministries of education, and educational and professional associations. (BT)

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Fran Schmidt

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My Journey as a Peace Educator

Fran Schmidt

"What or who influenced you to become a peace educator?" This is not an easy question, but Fran Schmidt tries to answer it. In so doing, she describes the many different, interesting and widely known contributions to peace education that she has made over the years, often together with her sister, Grace Contrino Abrams, or her close friend, Alice Moffat Friedman. In the process of giving us autobiographical notes, Fran Schmidt also reflects on past and present conceptions or philosophies of peace education. Among other things, while she sees nonviolent conflict resolution as an important focus, she emphasizes that the broader concept of peace education should not be lost. Finally, some visions of the future of peace education are presented.

To contact the author:

Home address: Fran Schmidt, 221 Palm Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139, United States
Business phone: +1(305) 673-8299
E-mail address: fschmidt@gate.net

Introduction: The Beginning

"What or who influenced you to become a peace educator?" This is not an easy question. I didn't just awake one morning and say, "I'm going to be a peace educator and make it my life's work." Becoming a peace educator is a process that begins and develops throughout one's life.

My father was a poor Italian immigrant from Sicily with a limited education. My mom was born in New York City, also poor and with a fourth grade education. Together they had five children. My family was on welfare because Dad had a bad heart and Mom was in poor health. My older sister had rheumatic heart disease and my younger brother had neurofibromatosis, a disease that caused tumors to form along the nerve endings.

Yet, my parents had a deep awareness of justice and injustice about world events. They viewed the world as good and bad. As my father read the daily newspaper, he constantly voiced his opinions as to the justice or morality of the issue. As a result, my older sister, Grace, and I became aware of the many economic, political, and social disparities in our society and world.

As a young teen-ager I was actively involved in the early civil rights movement through the YWCA. We spoke out against discrimination and organized young people to fill out petitions to have Jackie Robinson play in the Major Leagues.

But, it was my late sister Grace (Contrino Abrams) who had the most profound effect on my becoming a peace educator. Because of her heart disease, Grace spent many years in and out of hospitals, often in great pain. Even at an early age, she was an activist. She wrote many letters to the President, elected officials, and the newspapers describing how the poor and elderly were treated in the hospitals and urged that the government provide national health insurance for all.

It was during the Korean War, when my brother John was drafted, that Grace and I began our commitment to do something to end war. We tried to influence him to become a conscientious objector, but he wouldn't hear of it. So he was sent to Korea. Fortunately, the war was in its final phases and he never had to fight or kill anyone.

However, speaking out against this "police action" became our first step toward becoming peace activists. One of the letters that Grace and I wrote to the daily newspapers was answered by a woman lawyer, who introduced us to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

During the fifties and sixties, Grace and I became more and more involved as peace activists through the WILPF. We were protesting nuclear proliferation, atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons, the increasing involvement of the United States in Viet Nam, and segregation.

Despite her many health set-backs, Grace became a teacher – a great teacher. She was always a maverick and often spoke up whenever and wherever she perceived an injustice. Her students loved her and they often found great comfort and understanding when confiding their problems to her.

I, too, became a teacher, and a mother of two children, a girl and a boy. The Viet Nam war became a national nightmare. My husband and I were alarmed that the war would continue and our son would be drafted. We were prepared to move to Canada.

It was during this time, the late sixties, that Grace suggested that we write a curriculum to teach children how to make peace. It sounded like a wonderful idea, but neither of us had any idea as to what a peace curriculum would include, because we knew of none that existed.

Our Early Work with the Jane Addams Peace Association

Grace and I would spend hours typing on our Royal typewriter our ideas as to what this curriculum would include. ***Learning Peace, Ain't Gonna Study War No More*** was our first unit for secondary students. It was published by the Jane Addams Peace Association in 1972. The materials focused on war and peace. Students were encouraged to look at the economic, social, and political reasons for war and to look at alternatives for resolving conflict.

Our second curriculum ***Peace Is In Our Hands,*** published in 1974 for elementary students, took on a more personal perspective. Students studied the connections that linked them to the human family, how to understand their feelings, how to deal with their angry feelings, and how to deal with conflict nonviolently. Other topics included war, peace, Nobel peace prize

winners, Declaration of Human Rights, the Rights of the Children, and the preservation of the environment.

Grace and I began to hear from other educators who wanted to thank us for taking on the task of putting together a war/peace curriculum that they could implement in their classrooms.

We were in great demand to do workshops around the country. Because of Grace's poor health, these workshops were limited. However, they helped change our direction and focus. There was always at least one teacher who would point out that "kids want peace, but they have no idea how to make peace with the kid sitting next to them." At first, Grace and I were baffled. Here we were talking about world peace, and these teachers were talking about kids getting along. But, it became apparent these two were connected. Our challenge was to make the connection work.

The Dade County School System

In the 1970s, The Dade County School System Department of Social Studies asked Grace and me to write several curriculums; among them were ***Between War and Peace,*** and ***Alternatives to Violence*** for elementary, middle, and high schools. This was still during the Vietnam war and the civil rights movement. Students were hungry to learn peacemaking skills. From this beginning, we made many changes, constantly improving the concepts and skills.

Grace and I were strongly influenced by the work of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As we read their works, we kept discussing ways that we could take their ideas and bring them to the level of understanding for children of all ages.

Grace died at the end of 1979, a year after going through open heart surgery. Her friends and students were devastated. With their encouragement, I and several of her closest friends started the *Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation* in 1980 to continue our work.

A New Beginning 1980–1995

In life, there are many wonderful coincidences. A few years before Grace died, I had the fortunate opportunity to work with a very gifted teacher, Alice Moffat Friedman. It was uncanny. She reminded me of Grace – solid, sensible, creative.

After Grace died, Alice became an active founder of the *GCAPEF*. She became my new partner. Together, Alice and I gave new meaning to Peace Education. We wrote an article in "Trends and Issues", a publication of the Florida Council for the Social Studies (Summer Issue, 1991) and defined peace education:

"as a process of interaction on all levels of relationships towards a common goal. This process is based on a philosophy that teaches nonviolence, love, compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation, and reverence for the human family and all life on our planet... Peace education is a celebration of life. It is a holistic approach to human interaction. It embraces the physical, emotional, intellectual, ethical and social growth deeply rooted in traditional values.

If we are ever going to break the cycle of violence and war, whether on an interpersonal or international level, we must begin teaching our students how to deal with conflict nonviolently. We must replace an adversarial attitude with a cooperative working together to solve common problems.

Teachers can begin in their classrooms and prepare a cooperative and secure classroom environment that nurtures respect and self-esteem for all children.

Peace Education must include an understanding of conflict, violence, nonviolence, war, justice, oppression and poverty viewed from a global perspective."

We developed attractive student activity booklets based on the *Fighting Fair* concept. These books integrated conflict resolution, anger management, basic needs, respect for self and others, diversity, and the environment.

The materials were pilot tested with our respective students. By the end of December, I would see a magical transformation in my students. Name-calling and put downs practically ceased. Students used I-messages and began to work out their conflicts without my help. On occasion, I mediated a conflict. Students became quite knowledgeable about real issues: environmental degradation, poverty, segregation, and international conflicts. Students became activists. They wrote letters to their elected representatives about their feelings on current issues, entered peace essay and poster contests, and eagerly shared their ideas.

Within ten years, Alice and I wrote the following *PEACEWorks* curriculums which are in over 30,000 classrooms around the world. The materials have been translated into Spanish, French, and Creole.

Creative Conflict Solving For Kids - Grades 5–7, Copyright 1983
Fighting Fair: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for Kids - Grades 5–8, Copyright 1986
Peacemaking Skills for Little Kids - Grades 1–2, Copyright 1988
Fighting Fair for Families - Copyright 1989
Creative Conflict Solving for Kids - Grades 3–4, Copyright 1990
Come In Spaceship Earth - Copyright 1990
Mediation for Kids - Grades 4–6, Copyright 1991
Getting to Win Win: Mediation - Grades 7–12, Copyright 1994
WIN WIN - High School, Copyright 1994

We also developed the *Training Institute* which has trained thousands of educators around the world. The main focus was on conflict resolution skills and maintaining discipline in the classroom. Conflict resolution was quickly taking over peace education.

Peacebuilding in Jamaica

In 1994, I was invited to Jamaica by Oliver Clarke, publisher of The Gleaner, to introduce the peace education concept to the Ministry of Education, the media, and the religious and business community. Out of this meeting, the *PALS (Peace and Love in Schools) program* was born. My co-trainer, Bobby Popler Penn and I trained the core group of trainers and put together Teacher Manuals. The concept was to teach peace education to every student and teacher on the island. For the next four years, we returned to upgrade the skills of the core group and mentored them as they trained many hundreds of teachers. Today, conflict resolution skills are taught to all students as part of their curriculum.

This is truly an achievement, considering that teachers used violent methods to keep control. Students were humiliated in front of their peers, and discipline was maintained by corporal punishment. Teachers and principals walked around with a thin cane and were not reluctant about using it.

Over the years, I have worked with educators from many countries. What I have learned is that people around the world have different interpretations of peace education: inner peace, human rights education, global peace, economic and political justice, conflict resolution, etc. As we listened to each other and share our different perspectives, we agreed that all the concerns were a major part of peace education.

I always spoke up for the holistic model that included their concerns. We all agreed that we would have to begin with the teachers and convince them to become part of the peace education movement.

Another Beginning

Alice and I parted reluctantly from the Peace Foundation in 1995 because of irreconcilable differences with the President and Board of Directors. But with support from my family and many peace education friends, I moved into a new understanding of peace education.

After Alice and I left the Peace Foundation, management no longer kept us informed as to what they were doing. From one of the Board members, who I have kept in touch with, I learned that they mainly sell curriculum materials, including the ones that Alice and I wrote and continue to do workshops around the country.

"PeaceMaking Skills for Little Kids", which was conceived and written by Alice and me was redone with other teachers' names as authors. Their product was completely based on our work. We are in the process of trying to restore our names as the rightful authors. However, we have been told that we have no legal rights because we donated our copyrights to the Peace Foundation. If they are unwilling to do this, we will ask to have the matter go to mediation.

In the meantime, my friend Bobby Penn and I have created another organization: *Florida Institute for Peace Education and Research.* Our first program featured Arun Gandhi as workshop leader and luncheon speaker.

In the eighties, and early nineties, many schools were experiencing some form of violence and were interested in beginning conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. For the most part, counselors were taking on the responsibility to teach a few concepts to their students and carrying the brunt of the conflict resolution programs.

The concept of Peace Education was getting lost and I was determined that it shouldn't. It was time to create the PeaceMaker Series designed for the classroom teacher, and not the counselor. Suggestions were given to help teachers build a classroom environment based on trust, respect, caring, cooperation: the foundation for a peaceful world. The materials were written "across the curriculum" i. e. so that teachers could infuse the lessons in the language arts, social studies, health/sciences. The concepts and skills were introduced and reinforced throughout the grades.

The Rules for Fighting Fair was replaced with the *"We Can Work It Out!"* process. It was important that children learn to use and believe in the process so that it would become a part of their behavior and way of thinking.

Another major change was using a "kids' team" approach with a cast of characters, who would become the role models. Rather than children feeling that they need to belong to a gang, they were invited to take on the roles of Peace Rangers (Grades 1–2), Peace Sleuths (Grades 3–4), Peace Reporters (Grades 5–6) and Peace Ambassadors (middle and high schools). Students are involved in finding nonviolent ways to deal with prejudice, bullying, peer-pressure, rumors, gossip, violence, how to listen and communicate using peace language.

The PeaceMaker Series:

Grades 1–2. ***Gopher Peace and the Peace Rangers,*** Copyright 1997

Grades 3–4. ***Detective Makepeace and the Peace Sleuths,*** Copyright 1997

Grades 5–6. ***KPAN (Kids Peace Action Network) and the Peace Reporters,*** Copyright 1997

Grades 7–12/Youth Groups. ***Youth Peace Ambassadors,*** Copyright 2000

Experiences with the materials

Teachers who use the PeaceMaker Series report that the new curriculums are highly motivational and their students love taking on the different roles while they learn peacemaking.

First and second grade children write letters to Gopher Peace asking for advice. Their problems range from name-calling, bullying, to violence in the home. Gopher answers each letter.

"A girl bothers me at lunch. I told her to stop but she didn't. What can I do?" Megan. – "My mom and step dad are always fighting. Please help me." Jennifer. – "I have been using I messages. I like your books. They are very interesting." Adam.

Formal evaluations

Thus far, **Gopher Peace and the Peace Rangers** curriculum has been formally evaluated from September 1, 1998 to November 30, 1998 by an independent researcher, Dr. Adela Beckerman of Nova University.

There were five experimental classes and five control classes in three elementary schools. The about 320 students were equally divided between boys and girls, and reflected the wide racial and ethnic diversity of the South Florida community: African American, Haitian, Anglos, Hispanic, Asian.

The data from paired sample t-test comparing pre and post test responses indicated significant positive changes for the experimental group in 24 of the 28 areas studied.

Anecdotal reports provided by teachers of the students in the experimental group showed significant positive change in student's behavior, anger control, and ability to work out problems, share and work cooperatively. Teachers reported that they would continue teaching and reinforcing the peacemaking skills because they were life skills and even the teachers themselves benefited from using them.

There will soon also be a formal evaluation of the ***Peace Ambassador Program***. We will be working with 60 at-risk 6th graders and their parents doing team building, trust exercises, and nonviolent peace building, beginning in February, 2000. This project is one component of a three year grant received by Florida International University.

My Philosophy as a Peace Educator

My philosophy as a peace educator has grown and changed. In my early work, I viewed peace education as a war prevention strategy only. Now, I

realize that peace is a process of interaction on all levels of relationships, from the interpersonal to the international.

I believe that peace education is a holistic prevention approach and encompasses respect for self and others, building and maintaining loving relationships, violence prevention, nonviolence, human rights, conflict resolution, multi-cultural understanding, tolerance, global awareness, environmental concerns, social justice, and social responsibility.

The goal of peace education is both to build in the minds of children and adults a desire to live in a nonviolent and just world and to teach them the skills to understand and construct that world.

Peacemaking is more than a curriculum. It is a way of life. Peace is an on-going process and needs to be built every day. Since children learn what they live, it is critical that teachers create a safe environment that is based on love, caring, cooperation, trust, nonviolence, fairness, and nonviolent communication.

Perhaps peace education can be summed up in a three-dimensional holistic model that was formulated by Peter Weil in his book "The Art of Living in Peace" (1990):

Inner ecology: the art of living in peace with oneself: peace of the body, mind, spirit, and heart; forgiveness.

Social ecology: the art of living in peace with others, based on respect for each person's rights and dignity.

Planet-wide ecology: the art of living in peace with nature and protecting and creating a sustainable environment.

In the Future

Peace education will be a movement for the transformation of the entire educational system to facilitate the emergence of a new society, with parents, school, and community working together to create and live in a just and caring world. Each individual will become a Peace Ambassador, building bridges of peace, understanding and hope.

I envision that peace education and the principles of nonviolence, based on Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., will be an integral part of every teacher's and child's education. Teachers together will build the peaceable classroom sharing power and working cooperatively. Each school will become a place where needs are met and people feel part of an inclusive

caring community. When children and adults feel valued and respected, they no longer need to fear, hurt, or destroy each other. Dr. King's philosophy will permeate the learning environment: "Every word and every deed must build peace and understanding, not suspicion and hatred. What we do to others, we do to ourselves."

Conflict resolution techniques will be taught to children from preschool to high school. The skills will become a natural part of their behavior, and conflict will be handled more constructively. People will actually enjoy dealing with conflict because it will open new avenues of thinking and bring about greater understanding and rewards.

As a part of their education, students will be actively engaged in different service projects in their schools, communities, and world. As activists they will be using the peacemaking skills to build understanding, saving the environment, and making change nonviolently. We have seen young children help save the whales, the bears, and the rain forests. We have seen children like Craig Keilburger who started one of the largest children's organization, Free the Children, which speaks out for the rights of children and raises funds to build schools and hire teachers.

The internet makes it possible for children to communicate their ideas to each other easily and quickly. In this way, children will be breaking down barriers of fear, suspicion, and hatred and learn that they have common interests and goals.

The world is becoming more and more global and complex. It's critical that our children are prepared to understand their world and the political, social, and economic forces that are at work. Peace education will give us the hope, caring and skills that we need to help all of us live more productive lives on our beautiful planet. Peace education will motivate us to create a global community where members of the human family are mutually concerned with each other's well-being and their home, Planet Earth. We will have learned how to build a culture of peace and the "beloved community" as envisioned by Dr. King.

How far in the future? That depends on the commitment of all who are involved in the nurturing of children. It's up to us.

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